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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 GUATEMALA 000884

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [ASEC](#) [CASC](#) [SNAR](#) [PHUM](#) [GT](#)

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S MEETING WITH MINISTER OF GOVERNMENT

REF: A. GUATEMALA 834

[1](#)B. GUATEMALA 781
[1](#)C. GUATEMALA 770
[1](#)D. GUATEMALA 735

Classified By: Ambassador John R. Hamilton. Reason 1.5 (B&D).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Ambassador Hamilton met with Minister of Government Jose Adolfo Reyes Calderon March 31 to express concern about a recent case involving torture by security forces in an anti-narcotics raid in Zacapa. The Ambassador also raised the murder of an American citizen on March 28, threats against USAID contractors, and property destruction by squatters at a ranch owned by AmCits in Alta Verapaz province. Reyes Calderon implied that he suspected that the military was responsible for any use of torture in the Zacapa case and claimed to have recently reiterated his absolute rejection the use of torture to police and the anti-narcotics squad; said he believed ex-guerilla forces turned criminal were responsible for the murder of AmCit Edward Todd Fields; pledged to provide police protection requested by the Forensic Anthropology Foundation; and promised to act on the allegations of illegal entry and destruction of AmCit property by squatters in Alta Verapaz. We will continue to monitor the progress of all these cases. End Summary.

Torture Case

[1](#)2. (C) RefTel D reports the circumstances of a 179 kg. seizure of cocaine and ephedrine (later confirmed as caffeine) from a ranch in Rio Hondo, Zacapa province, as reported to Embassy NAS by the Guatemalan Counter-Narcotics Police (SAIA). Ref C reports the Ambassador's warning to President Portillo that information verified by MINUGUA indicating the use of torture to extract information from three of five trafficking suspects in this case was unacceptable and could severely prejudice Guatemala's prospects for counter-narcotics recertification. Per RefTel B, according to MINUGUA, the victims were tortured by persons wearing National Civil Police and SAIA uniforms. Unofficial Embassy law enforcement contacts have told us that the operation involved military operatives disguised as civilian police. Our sources allege that drugs were planted on the three suspects before the larger seizure at the ranch, and that the military reported only half the total seizure.

[1](#)3. (C) The Ambassador told Reyes Calderon that the use of torture in this or any case is unacceptable. He informed Reyes Calderon of his earlier demarche to the President, and warned that the violation of human rights in any counter-narcotics cases would severely undermine any progress toward recertification. "We do not want to win the drug war this way," he said. Reyes Calderon acknowledged and agreed with these concerns. Reyes Calderon said that he had arrived by helicopter on the scene after the arrests were made. He hinted that the military, not the policemen or SAIA agents present, were responsible if any human rights violations were committed in that operation, which he implied was organized (rather than simply supported) by the military. The Ambassador asked if Reyes Calderon had spoken with Minister of Defense Moran about his suspicions. Reyes Calderon said he had raised the case with Moran without making any accusations, and had been told by Moran that the head of the military intelligence unit (D-2) was being replaced (presumably for complicity in this case). The Ambassador told Reyes Calderon that the Embassy is aware of the D-2 chief's ouster and understands that his removal was for reasons that predated this incident. Reyes Calderon agreed that any similar cases must be prevented, said he had made Ministry policy against the use of torture abundantly clear to his subordinates in the wake of this case, and said he would raise this case in a Cabinet meeting later that day.

AmCit Murder

[1](#)4. (U) The Ambassador also raised with Reyes Calderon the brazen murder on March 28 of U.S. citizen Edward Todd Fields on the main highway to a popular tourist destination, reported in Ref A. The Ambassador told Reyes Calderon that the Embassy was considering advising all Americans to avoid travel by road to Lake Atitlan. He urged the minister to make every effort to catch those responsible for this outrageous crime, and pointed out that he passed by the same

route an hour before the victim, and saw only one police cruiser on the road during his 100-mile trip on Guatemala's principal highway. Reyes Calderon said he believed that members of the former guerrilla Organization of the People in Arms (ORPA) to be responsible for the murder and said the police will beef up patrols along the route immediately. He acknowledged the importance of this case and the vital economic importance of security along major tourist routes. (Comment: It is not clear why Reyes blamed ex-ORPA members for the killing, other than to give the impression that the government had some leads. In a meeting the next day, National Police (PNC) Director Manchame also said the police suspect ex-ORPA elements. End Comment.)

FAFG Threats

15. (SBU) The Ambassador then raised the case of recent threats against family members of workers at the Forensic Anthropology Institute (FAFG), the USAID-contracted NGO performing exhumations of massacres during the internal conflict. Reyes Calderon said he was familiar with the group, its prior experience receiving threats, and the ministry's provision of special protection, voluntarily relinquished by FAFG after a period of concern in 2002. The Ambassador provided Reyes Calderon with a request from FAFG for police security for five homes and the assignment of security agents to three individuals, including FAFG Director Fredy Peccerelli and his sister Bianka, who was recently accosted by armed men. Reyes Calderon reviewed the list and agreed to provide the protection requested.

Alta Verapaz Land Dispute

16. (SBU) Finally, the Ambassador raised the troubling case of the Ardebol family, U.S. citizens of Spanish origin whose ranches have been occupied by landless peasants in Alta Verapaz. Carlos Ardebol, the owner of a ranch located in Coban district, has for several weeks been prevented by squatters from entering his home at the "Esmeralda" ranch for fear of attack by the squatters. Ardebol, who has been in touch with the Embassy and GOG authorities about the land occupation, has relocated his family to the capital, but recently learned that squatters organized by the National Coordination of Campesino Organizations (CONIC) have destroyed personal property left behind. The Ambassador told Reyes Calderon that Mr. Ardebol was willing to engage in dialogue with the squatters and their representatives. The recent criminal destruction of property, which Ardebol has denounced to legal authorities, violates the law and the spirit of dialogue to which he had been committed. Reyes Calderon said that police action in this case would be prompt if sanctioned by legal authorities.

Comment

17. (C) Reyes Calderon appeared nervous during this meeting requested by the Ambassador, and was quick to agree to all the Ambassador's requests. The Ambassador has scheduled a meeting with Minister of Defense Moran to repeat our concerns about the alleged use of torture in counter-narcotics operations. MINUGUA has told us it will decide when to go public with its findings sometime this week. We will continue to follow GOG action on these cases closely.

HAMILTON